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ABSTRACT

In the 1995-96 school year, the Memphis (Tennessee) City Schools released standards for student performance in seven content areas and began laying the foundation for a standards-based curriculum and assessment system. The steps taken to develop and implement this project are outlined as follows: (1) defining the objectives and the project scope; (2) creating a budget and funding plan; (3) designing the tasks; (4) explaining the project to schools involved; (5) administering the tasks; (6) preparing student work for scoring; (7) reading student work and choosing anchor papers; (8) training teachers to score student work using a rubric and anchor book; (9) compiling and analyzing the data; and (10) evaluating the experience. The experience of the Memphis schools indicates the advisability of starting on a small scale, involving the right people, and rewarding the participating schools. The 10-step plan can enable a district to launch a performance assessment project that is comprehensive, confidential, and responsible. (SLD)

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10 STEPS TO DISTRICT PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

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10 Steps to District Performance Assessment

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Jerome gazed at the straw mounted on the wall poster in his cafeteria-turned-testing site. "What's My Length?" said the lettering above the straw. He knew he wasn't allowed to touch it. He already tried holding the imaginary length between his outstretched hands, but it got too big before he could get his hands to his ruler. All of a sudden, an idea struck Jerome. He raised his right arm, matching his elbow to one end of the straw, and marked off the length on his arm. Now this was a marker that didn't move. Jerome entered his estimate in the test booklet and went on to explain how he reached his answer.

"Testing" was more interesting for Jerome on this occasion than it had ever been in first or second grade. As a third grader, Jerome was included in the new district "Performance Assessment Pilot Project," designed as a district level audit to begin establishing a baseline for student performance toward the Memphis City Schools (MCS) Content Standards. The development of standards has been part of the Memphis School District restructuring plan since the development of Life-Long Learning Standards by a community task force in 1993-94. The "Performance Assessment Pilot Project" describes the process used by the Memphis School District to conduct an audit of student performance in 10 schools through the development and implementation of performance-based assessments.

Background

During the 1995-96 school year, the MCS Office of Student Standards released Draft K - 12 Content Standards and Specific Expectations in seven content areas: arts/visual arts/ theatre/music; English/language arts; foreign language; health/ wellness/ physical education; mathematics; science, and social studies. These standards had been developed by action teams of MCS teachers and community leaders. A training plan was initiated in September, 1996 to introduce all teachers (7,727) to the standards through a series of faculty meetings, conducted in all schools (161) by their principals. In conjunction with the faculty meetings, the Performance Assessment Pilot Project began laying the practical foundation for a standards-based curriculum and assessment system. The steps taken to develop and implement this project are detailed below.

Step 1: Definition of the objectives and scope for the project.

The project had several objectives. One was to develop performance-based assessment tasks that were clearly linked to the content standards. Another objective was the implementation of the tasks in ten schools, thereby establishing a performance baseline for future comparison. A third objective was the training of teachers in the characteristics of performance assessment tasks, as well as in techniques for using rubrics to score student work.

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The parameters were established for the project, to include tasks in the four core content areas (math, science, social studies, English/language arts), and a range of grade levels representative of the whole district. Of the ten schools, two were high schools, two were middle schools and six were elementary schools. The ten schools invited to participate were the same ten that had been part of a Goals 2000 project the previous year. Because of the district's commitment to science and mathematics education, the ten performance assessment tasks included three in science and three in math, as well as two in English/language arts and two in social studies. It was determined that the tasks would be administered to 50 students from each of the ten schools.

Step 2: Creation of a budget and funding plan.

The budget for the MCS project included these items: stipends to pay teachers for the two-day scoring event; printing costs for the testing materials and anchor books; manipulatives used in the task administrations.

Step 3: Design of the tasks.

Office of Student Standards facilitators were assigned grade levels and schools for their task development. Some staff members designed original tasks, while others adapted public-domain tasks to the MCS standards. Three *Check Points* were set to provide feedback to the developers, and to guarantee that all materials would be ready on time for task administration.

Step 4: Explanation of the project to schools in the process.

Careful explanation and cooperation with the pilot schools are critical to the success of the project. The principals of the selected schools were invited to a meeting, during which the project was explained and they were given a range of days and times from which to choose the task administration date. Principals returned their *Choice Form*, and received a confirmation letter. The individual staff members who would administer the tasks visited the schools prior to the task administration, in order to view the space and confer with the classroom teachers whose children would be involved. Schools submitted lists of the students they expected to be involved, which provided an initial database for accurate tracking. These lists included the student identification numbers, which provide access to the district's central database.

Step 5: Administion of the tasks.

Office of Student Standards staff were divided into teams for task administration. A list of specific jobs for the Task Administrator, the Assistant Administrator and the Videographer was prepared. The staff held a rehearsal so all staff would be familiar with each task. Each task was videotaped for archive and training purposes. The Assistant Administrator completed the *Task Administration Report*, which provided the final list of students who participated in the assessment. At the end of each of the four testing days, the full staff met for a debriefing session, with the discussion guided by the *Performance Task Administration Evaluation* form. When all testing was completed, the student

work and the *Task Administration Report* were turned in to the project coordinator. All manipulatives used for the project were given to the participating schools. A total of 446 tasks were administered in the 10 schools.

Step 6: Preparation of the student work for scoring.

The clerical work in this step was critical to tracking the assessment results and maintaining student confidentiality. A final list of student participants from each school was created, verified from the student work, the initial lists and the *Task Administration Report*, and sent to the MCS Research Office for the generation of a set of four labels with the student identification number for each student. Color-coded scoring sheets were printed according to content area: English/language arts tasks were scored with pink, turquoise and gold sheets; social studies tasks were scored with yellow, buff and lime sheets; science tasks were scored with green, violet and salmon sheets; and math tasks were scored with blue, tan and orange sheets.

Clerical staff prepared the student work and three scoring sheets for each student by placing a student identification number label on the work and each of the three scoring sheets. Staff removed and collected the front covers of each test packet, which included the student's name, grade, race, gender and school. Each piece of student work was numbered by schools, according to an assigned list. The work packets were clipped together, ready for the staff reading sessions.

Step 7: Reading of the student work, choosing anchor papers.

The Standards staff was divided into reading teams. After discussing the prompt, the student directions and the rubric, the teams read all the student work, beginning to categorize it according to the scoring rubric. The teams chose a representative student response from each scoring level to be used as the "anchor" paper. The staff reading teams completed the *Task Summary Sheet*. An anchor book was compiled and printed for each task, containing the scoring rubric and the student anchor samples.

Step 8: Training of teachers to score student work, using a rubric and anchor book.

The actual scoring of the student work was done by teachers over a two-day period. Teachers were paid for these days, which served a two-fold function. Not only was the scoring accomplished, but the teachers received professional development in evaluation. The first half-day session was devoted to training. After trainees were introduced to the use of a scoring rubric, they were given the anchor book and rubric for one of the tasks. The trainer demonstrated the relationship between the rubric and the anchor paper. Trainees were then given five samples of student work from the same task. Working in groups of four, trainees discussed these samples and arrived by consensus at a score for each. The trainer led a discussion of the correct evaluation of each of the student samples.

The trainees worked in pairs for the next training exercise. Using a new task, rubric and anchor book, the teachers scored six student work samples, using the double score method.

The Double Score Method

The double scoring method involves identifying one teacher as "Scorer #1" and the other as "Scorer #2." Scorer #1 reads and scores three of the six papers, while Scorer #2 reads and scores the other three. Then the scorers switch papers so both scorers read all six papers. It is helpful for each scorer to use a separate color scoring sheet. This visual identification system makes it clear that each sample has been scored twice. When both scorers have read all the samples, they may compare their scores and seek to reach consensus on any work they scored differently.

When all trainee pairs completed the scoring, the trainer led the whole group in a discussion of the process. The goal of was to reach 85% interrater reliability, or better. That is to say, when each pair of scorers had reached agreement on five out of the six student sample scores, their goal was reached. The trainer surveyed the group to determine if at least 80% of the pairs had reached their goal of 85% interrater reliability. If the group had not reached this goal, they repeated this exercise, using an entirely different task, rubric, anchor book, and student work samples.

The actual scoring sessions began when the trainer determined an acceptable level of interrater reliability had been reached. Once assigned a task, each pair of teachers proceeded to double score the student samples. Their work was monitored every six samples by the "Master Scorer," a role filled by Office of Student Standards facilitators. For example, the math facilitator who had designed the math tasks, served as Master Scorer for all math scoring pairs. The Master Scorer checked each group of six scored student work samples, filling out a *Proofing/Monitor Form*. The purpose of this check point was to provide a quality control procedure to make sure interrater reilability maintained the 85% agreement level, and that the scoring remained consistent with the rubric. In cases of unresolved disagreement, the Master Scorer made the decision. When the scoring teams finished their work, they completed the *Scoring Summary Sheet* and submitted it to the Master Scorer, along with all student work samples.

Step 9: Compiling and analyzing the data.

The 446 student scores were entered in the database, and a summary report was produced, entitled *Fall Assessment, 1996: Score Results* , which is the report of baseline performance results. This report listed the number and percentage of students at each school who scored each of the rubric levels on the task (score levels 0 - 4). The data may be analyzed and presented in appropriate formats to address any questions of concern to the district. For example, MCS is interested in gender differences in math and science performance. Consequently a table was prepared, entitled *Science and Math: Percentage of Students Scoring "Proficient" by Gender*, which presented the percentage of males and females scoring "3" or "4" in all science and math tasks at the four assessment grade levels (3rd, 6th, 8th, and 11th

grade). MCS also chose to examine the percentage of students scoring proficient by grade level, content area and gender across all tasks.

Step 10: Evaluation of the experience.

MCS personnel engaged in project evaluation were able to make several recommendations, including the following:

1. **Start small.** Unnecessary burdens on the whole system can be avoided by establishing manageable parameters from the beginning,

2. **Involve the right people.** The "right people" in the MCS project included eight teachers-on-assignment, who were helpful in task design, review and administration. The scoring teachers were also the "right people" as they came to realize how valuable the experience would be for their own classroom use.

3. **Reward the participating schools.** This can be done by public recognition, and by the gifting of project manipulatives and other materials.

Conclusion

The ten step plan described in this paper can enable a district to launch a performance assessment project that is comprehensive, confidential and responsible. The confidentiality of all individual students and schools was maintained throughout the process. All objectives of the Memphis City Schools project were met in a timely manner. This result, coupled with the surge of enthusiasm that ignited the teachers and principals involved, meets all the criteria for a perfect "4:" a Distinguished Performance.